

WENDY SHATTIL & BOB ROZINSKI

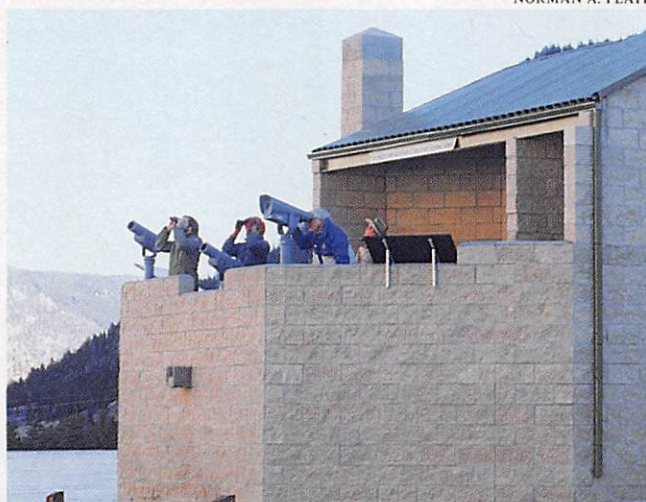


BROKEN OR "BROOMED" tips on bighorn ram's spiral horns may be the result of grooming on rocks or of battles during fall rut.

STONE-FRONTED viewing deck allows a telescopic look at bighorns on the neighboring slope.

Where the bighorns are butting heads

There's a good viewing area an easy drive west of Denver



NORMAN A. PLATE

BARRELING AT ONE another furiously, bighorn rams smash skull on skull with resounding cracks that can be heard a mile away. These dramatic head-butting duels (sometimes lasting hours) are part of the fall courtship ritual of the Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep. There's no more convenient place to see this startling spectacle—and one of Colorado's largest big-

horn herds—than at a new wildlife-viewing area an hour's drive west of Denver.

Just off Interstate 70, the Georgetown Wildlife Viewing Area looks across to a long ridge where up to 175 sheep graze. The area offers unusually easy access to a reliable spot for seeing these notoriously shy mammals. The size of the herd is an indication that continuing restoration and management efforts on this Bureau of Land Management (BLM) site are working—numbers have bounced back from a low of 40 animals in 1980.

Ewes and their young stay here all year except June, when the herd retreats to higher country for lambing. The best time to visit is when rams join the herd, from late October through February. The dramatic duels may occur anytime into January, during rutting season, as rams fight to win dominance.

for good viewing, yet far enough for the animals' comfort so that people at the viewing area don't frighten them off.

Bighorn sheep are short and muscular, with rams standing up to 3½ feet tall at the shoulder and weighing up to 320 pounds. Ewes are about a third smaller. The sheep are delicately agile and even rather noble in profile (hunters consider them a prize trophy head). The ones with massive horns are rams—a full curl with tips reaching eye level tells you the animal is seven to eight years old (ewes' horns are slimmer and shorter).

Their tan to dark brown coloring blends so well with their grassy hillside habitat that it's difficult to spot them at first. Be patient and scan the hillside for the animals' telltale white rump patches.

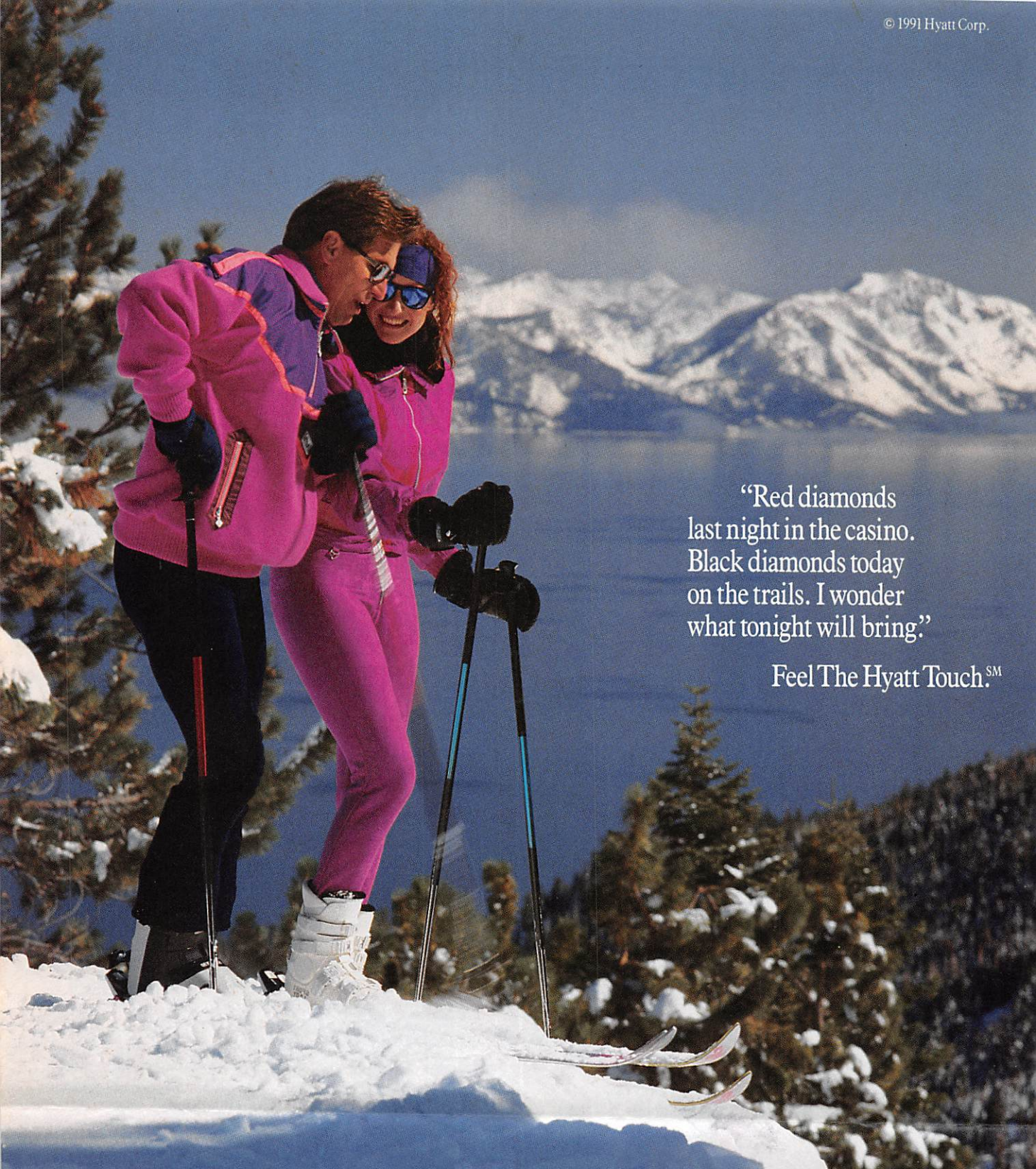
Sheep are most active from dawn to midmorning, and late afternoon to dusk. You'll find it a bit more comfortable to wait and watch for them if you're dressed warmly—while the platform offers some wind protection, it's in the bottom of a steep little valley that acts as a kind of cold sink.

The free viewing area was an effort of several agencies, mainly the Colorado Division of Wildlife, BLM, Forest Service, National Park Service, and Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep Society. It's open from dawn to dusk daily. To reach it from Denver, take Interstate 70 west about 45 miles to exit 228 (Georgetown). Go into town, then turn left on Alvarado Boulevard and follow signs to the viewing area a mile ahead.

Two new brochures can help you learn more about these sheep and other wildlife in the state. *Bighorn Sheep Watching Guide* and *Watching Wildlife Close to Home* (\$3 each) are available by mail order. Write to the Colorado Division of Wildlife, Watchable Wildlife Program, 6060 Broadway, Denver 80216. ■

VIEWING THE HERD FROM THE NEW LOOKOUT

The stone lookout's high platform makes a good vantage point. Interpretive signs help you locate the animals, and coin-operated spotting scopes bring them closer (bring quarters or your own binoculars). The sheep clamber about a steep, south-facing slope, close enough and well lighted much of the day



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